

OBITUARY



DR. MARION RUSSELL SMITH
1894-1981

Dr. Marion Russell Smith, "Pat" to his friends and colleagues, died December 29, 1981, over 17 years after retiring from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. During his long career, he built an enviable reputation as a national and international authority on ants.

Dr. Smith was born June 19, 1894, in Pendleton, South Carolina, and was one of six children of James Dawson and Celema Russell Smith. He attended public schools in Pendleton, then entered Clemson College, just a few miles away, where he obtained his B.S. degree in 1915. In 1917, he received a M.S. degree from Ohio State University. After periods of employment with the Bureau of Entomology, U.S. Department of Agriculture, as a scientific assistant working on biology and control of truck crop insects (1917-1918), at Clemson College as assistant entomologist (1918-1919), with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture as extension entomologist (1919-1920), at Fort Mill High School in

South Carolina as an instructor in vocational agriculture (1920–1921), and with the Mississippi State Plant Board as an assistant entomologist and specialist on ants in charge of mapping infestations and directing control and eradication programs of the Argentine ant (1921–1924), he attended the University of Illinois and was awarded his Ph.D. in 1927. After his graduate work, he returned to Mississippi as an associate professor at Mississippi State College and was involved in work on ants as well as teaching. Intermittently, he was also employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1931–1933 as entomologist in charge of Argentine ant surveys, in 1935–1936 in Puerto Rico for research on the pineapple mealy bug and coffee insects, and in 1936–1937 with the Southern Forest Experiment Station at Provençal, Louisiana, working on the control of the Texas leafcutting ant. In 1937, Dr. Smith was hired by the Division of Insect Identification, Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., later known as the Insect Identification and Parasite Introduction Research Branch, Entomology Research Division, where he was employed until his retirement in 1964. His work involved taxonomic research on ants, ant identification, and curation of the ants in the National Collection at the Smithsonian Institution.

Dr. Smith's interest in ants began in 1915, and his first publication in 1916 dealt with some observations on ants in South Carolina. However, early interests resulted in articles on other insects such as a list of Syrphidae of northern Indiana (1919) and the bembicine wasps of North Carolina (1920). During his employment with the Mississippi State Plant Board, he worked under the direction of the late R. W. Harned who encouraged him to work on the ants of Mississippi and other states. Dr. Smith always credited Dr. Harned for the special encouragement that guided him into his productive career. From 1916–1969, Dr. Smith published 150 articles, mostly concerning the taxonomy and biology of ants. He described 86 new taxa, worldwide, but concentrated on the fauna of North America. A list of his publications and taxa described was published in 1973 in the *Proceedings of the Entomological Society of Washington* (vol. 75, no. 1, pp. 88–95). Some major contributions were keys for the identification of genera of North American ants based on males (1943) and workers (1947). The key to males is a classic work and is the only such key available. In 1936, he published on the ants of Puerto Rico which was based largely on his own collecting and observations during his stay there in 1935–1936; this is still the only comprehensive treatment of the ant fauna of that island. Preparation of the ant section for the catalog "Hymenoptera of America North of Mexico" (1951) took much of his time, and he also prepared the ant sections of the 1958 and 1967 supplements to that catalog. A major contribution was his bulletin "House-Infesting Ants of the Eastern United States, Their Recognition, Biology, and Economic Importance" (1965), a work that was so much in demand that it was reprinted in 1972. In this, 50 of the most common and economically important ants are illustrated, keyed, and discussed. It was prepared largely from the meticulous records he kept during his many years experience with the U.S. Department of Agriculture concerning the incidences of ant species in buildings and other accumulated notes on the importance of ants. It is a widely used reference for extension entomologists and others having to answer inquiries about ants. The many other biological and revisionary works

are too many to mention, but his major efforts were directed toward improving the knowledge of ants through preparation of identification aids and clarification of nomenclature.

On New Year's Day, 1920, Dr. Smith married Myra W. Fant of Walhalla, South Carolina. Their marriage lasted until her death in 1980. They have two children, Mrs. Marian S. Stossel of McLean, Virginia, and Dr. David H. Smith of Salisbury, North Carolina, and five grandchildren. Dr. Smith was a member of the Entomological Society of Washington, Entomological Society of America, Sigma Xi, and, for several years, the Cosmos Club. He was an elder in the Presbyterian Church, Church of the Pilgrims, Washington, D.C., for 20 years.

After his retirement in 1964, Dr. Smith lived at his home in Arlington, Virginia. He never returned to work at the Museum, partly because of his failing eyesight. He spent much of his retirement gardening and with his family, frequently returning to his boyhood home in South Carolina to be with relatives. Though not directly involved in research, his interest in ants continued. As a prolific correspondent, he kept in touch with his many colleagues and co-workers throughout the world and was always anxious and interested in hearing from them. He would often call me to find out what was going on in the "ant world," what interesting specimens had come in for identification, whom I had heard from, or any other recent news. He was always most cooperative, kind, and did much to stimulate the interest of young taxonomists. Over the phone and during my visits to his home, he helped to arouse my interest and help me get started in the ant responsibilities assigned to me. He truly enjoyed his work, a factor that may have contributed to his long life.

After the death of his wife, he spent his last year with his daughter in McLean. He succumbed to cancer, December 29, 1981. He is survived by both children and five grandchildren. His illustrious career left a most favorable and indelible impression in the field of myrmecology.

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